

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method of servicing content for delivery to a client device, said  
5 method comprising:
  - identifying a type of service to be performed on an item of content,  
wherein said item of content is identified during a session involving said client  
device;
  - 10 using an estimate of resources associated with performing said service  
to select a provider from a plurality of providers capable of performing said  
service; and
  - 15 providing information for transferring said session to said provider,  
wherein said provider performs said service on said item of content upon  
being transferred said session.
2. The method of Claim 1 wherein said resources comprise  
estimated computational resources associated with performing said service.  
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3. The method of Claim 2 wherein said selecting comprises:  
20 maintaining a record comprising resources available at each of said  
providers; and  
selecting said provider according to said record.  
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4. The method of Claim 1 wherein said resources comprise  
estimated bandwidth associated with said session.  
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5. The method of Claim 4 wherein said selecting comprises:  
maintaining a record comprising bandwidth available to each of said  
providers; and  
selecting said provider according to said record.  
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6. The method of Claim 1 wherein said selecting comprises:  
maintaining a record comprising providers to which sessions have  
been transferred; and  
selecting said provider according to said record.  
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7. The method of Claim 1 further comprising:  
estimating an amount of time said session is expected to remain with  
said provider.  
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8. The method of Claim 1 further comprising:  
receiving an indication from said provider that said service is  
completed.

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9. The method of Claim 1 wherein said transferring comprises:  
sending information for locating said provider to said client device,  
wherein said client device and said provider transparently establish  
communication.

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10. The method of Claim 1 further comprising:  
identifying a source of said item of content, wherein data for said item of  
content are streamed from said source to said provider and wherein service  
result data are streamed from said provider to said client device.

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11. A method of managing providers that service content for  
streaming to a client device, said method comprising:

identifying a type of service to be performed on an item of content,  
wherein said item of content is identified during a session involving said client  
device;

20 maintaining a record comprising resources associated with a plurality  
of providers capable of performing said service; and

selecting a provider from said plurality of providers based on  
information in said record, wherein said session is transferred to said provider,  
25 wherein data for said item of content are streamed from a source to said  
provider and wherein service result data are streamed from said provider to  
said client device.

30 12. The method of Claim 11 wherein said maintaining comprises:  
estimating resources associated with performing said service; and  
updating said record to reflect a change in resources associated with  
said provider based on said provider performing said service.

35 13. The method of Claim 11 further comprising:  
providing information for transferring said session to said provider.

14. The method of Claim 11 wherein said resources comprise  
estimated computational resources associated with performing said service.

15. The method of Claim 11 wherein said resources comprise estimated bandwidth associated with said session.

16. The method of Claim 11 wherein said record comprises a list of  
5 providers to which sessions have been transferred.

17. The method of Claim 11 further comprising:  
estimating a duration of said session.

10 18. The method of Claim 11 further comprising:  
receiving a signal from said provider after said provider performs said service.

15 19. A system for providing content to a client device, said system comprising:

a service manager for receiving a request for an item of content from a portal, wherein said portal received said request from said client device, wherein said service manager is also for selecting a provider from a plurality of providers, each provider capable of performing a service on said item of content, wherein said service manager maintains a record comprising resources associated with said providers and wherein said service manager uses an estimate of resources associated with performing said service to select said provider according to information in said record.  
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25 20. The system of Claim 19 wherein said service manager updates said record to reflect a change in resources associated with said provider based on said provider performing said service.

30 21. The system of Claim 19 wherein said resources comprise estimated computational resources associated with performing said service.

22. The system of Claim 19 wherein said resources comprise estimated bandwidth available to said provider.

35 23. The system of Claim 19 wherein said record comprises information showing which of said providers are performing a service.

24. The system of Claim 19 wherein said service manager estimates an amount of time for said provider to perform said service.

25. The system of Claim 19 wherein said service manager receives a signal from said provider after said provider performs said service.

5 26. A system for streaming content to a client device, said system comprising:

a service manager for receiving a request for an item of content from a portal, wherein said portal received said request from said client device, wherein said service manager is also for selecting a provider from a plurality 10 of providers, each provider capable of performing a service on said item of content, wherein said service manager maintains a record comprising resources associated with said providers and wherein said service manager uses an estimate of resources associated with performing said service to select said provider according to information in said record, wherein data for 15 said item of content are streamed from a source to said provider and wherein service result data are streamed from said provider to said client device.

27. The system of Claim 26 wherein said service manager updates said record to reflect a change in resources associated with said provider 20 based on said provider performing said service.

28. The system of Claim 26 wherein said resources comprise estimated computational resources associated with performing said service.

25 29. The system of Claim 26 wherein said resources comprise estimated bandwidth available to said provider.

30 30. The system of Claim 26 wherein said record comprises information showing which of said providers are performing a service.

31. The system of Claim 26 wherein said service manager estimates an amount of time for said provider to perform said service.

35 32. The system of Claim 26 wherein said service manager receives a signal from said provider after said provider performs said service.

33. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable program code embodied therein for causing a computer system to perform a method for servicing content for delivery to a client device, said method comprising:

- 5 identifying a type of service to be performed on an item of content,
- 5 wherein said item of content is identified during a session involving said client device;
- using an estimate of resources associated with performing said service to select a provider from a plurality of providers capable of performing said service; and
- 10 providing information for transferring said session to said provider, wherein said provider performs said service on said item of content upon being transferred said session.

34. The computer-readable medium of Claim 33 wherein said computer-readable program code embodied therein causes said computer system to perform said method further comprising:

- maintaining a record comprising resources available at each of said providers; and
- selecting said provider according to said record.

20 35. The computer-readable medium of Claim 33 wherein said computer-readable program code embodied therein causes said computer system to perform said method further comprising:

- 25 maintaining a record comprising bandwidth available to each of said providers; and
- selecting said provider according to said record.

30 36. The computer-readable medium of Claim 33 wherein said computer-readable program code embodied therein causes said computer system to perform said method further comprising:

- maintaining a record comprising providers to which sessions have been transferred; and
- selecting said provider according to said record.

37. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable program code embodied therein for causing a computer system to perform a method for servicing content for streaming to a client device, said method comprising:

- identifying a type of service to be performed on an item of content,
- 5 wherein said item of content is identified during a session involving said client device;
- maintaining a record comprising resources associated with a plurality of providers capable of performing said service; and
- selecting a provider from said plurality of providers based on
- 10 information in said record, wherein said session is transferred to said provider, wherein data for said item of content are streamed from a source to said provider and wherein service result data are streamed from said provider to said client device.

15 38. The computer-readable medium of Claim 37 wherein said computer-readable program code embodied therein causes said computer system to perform said method further comprising:

- estimating resources associated with performing said service; and
- 20 updating said record to reflect a change in resources associated with said provider based on said provider performing said service.

39. The computer-readable medium of Claim 37 wherein said record comprises a list of providers to which sessions have been transferred.

25 40. The computer-readable medium of Claim 37 wherein said computer-readable program code embodied therein causes said computer system to perform said method further comprising:

- estimating a duration of said session.